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Exploring Determinants of Quality of Working Life

Quality of employee working life (QoWL) has been, and remains, a widely debated topic amongst employers, employees and policy makers. Contemporary research findings identify a diverse array of influences, relating to both intrinsic and extrinsic features of work. A net result of the complexity of sometimes complimentary, sometimes conflicting findings, is that many employers find it difficult to achieve focus in this area, and reap the intuitive benefits arising from enhancing the work experience of their employees, notably higher motivation; reduced labour turnover and enhanced industrial relations (DeJoy et al, 2010).

Identified determinants of QoWL include Pay and benefits (Kohn, 1993); quality of Leader-member exchange (Howell and Hall-Merenda, 1999); Training and personal development opportunities (Shaufeli and Bakker, 2004); high autonomy and flexibility (Galinsky, 2010); high intrinsic job satisfaction (Cote and Morgan, 2002); Work-Life balance (Matthews et al, 2006), and more. However, while there have been notable advances in identifying salient influences, what has remained opaque is the relative salience of these variables, i.e. which are the more important determinants of QoWL, and to what extent do employees share the same perspective on this?

The study reported here is thought to be the first systematic exploration of this issue. Based on foundation qualitative work aimed at charactering employee perspectives on variables impacting on quality of life, informed by insights from the literature, the following set of contributory components of QoWL was identified: *relationship with your manager; personal development and training; flexible working arrangements; job satisfaction; balance between work and home life; pay and benefits; social support; and equity and fair treatment* were rated in terms of their relative salience by a sample of employees (N = 215), of different ages, job grades; employment sectors (public and private) and genders.

Rather than directly ranking the components in order of importance, respondents completed a paired comparisons task (Thurstone, 1927), indicating which of a pair of components (for all permutations of pairings) they considered had a more important impact on QoWL. This approach represents an advance over a simple ordinal ranking (from high to low), in that the product is an interval scale, i.e. it is possible to plot the relative distance between the components, and identify which cluster towards the top (or bottom) of the scale.

While the results revealed notable variability between employees in terms of their rankings of QoWL components, a global finding was that *intrinsic job satisfaction* was rated as most salient, followed by *balance between work and home life; Pay and benefits; Relationship with your manager; colleague support and team work; flexible working arrangements; fair treatment and equality; satisfaction with life outside of work and staff development and training*. Note: this finding should not be interpreted as indicating that components further down the ranking are unimportant, rather the ranking represents the relative salience of a list of important elements.

More detailed analysis, aimed at exploring demographic differences revealed some interesting variations in relative salience of QoWL components and the relative salience of QoWL to employees, notably: linear relationships were found with regard to the importance of QoWL to employees by age and job grade, i.e. older employees placed a higher value on QoWL than younger employees, and employees in lower skilled jobs placed higher value on it than those at more senior levels. Similarly, public sector employees ascribed more value to QoWL than private sector employees, and men marginally more than women.

Overall, findings indicate the need for employers to gather good quality intelligence on employee perspectives on QoWL, and to recognise that while there is notably consensus amongst employees over core influences, their relative salience is prone to vary between

individuals, and in terms of a range of workplace demographics. This would suggest that when deepening interventions that employers need may need to adopt a segmented (rather than a one size fits all) approach to addressing QoWL.

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